

CUBA AND THE U.S.: THE 25-YEAR RUPTURE

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Twenty-five years ago on Jan. 3, 1961 the United States and Cuba, after a prolonged period of threats, insults, embargoes, harassment, intrigue and reprisals, broke diplomatic relations.

At the time, the rupture between long-time friends was expected to be short-lived. It has not turned out that way. A generation later, the hostility between the two countries appears unshakable. The areas of common ground are few. Each side views the other as being irretrievably expansionist.

The end to almost 60 years of Cuban-American diplomatic ties came on the first working day of 1961, as an old president prepared to retire and the country was ready to inaugurate a new president, John F. Kennedy, and a new era.

The break came just two years after Fidel Castro and his Sierra Maestra guerilla band overthrew the military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. It was precipitated Castro's demand that the United States reduce its diplomatic mission in Cuba from 87 to 11. Prime Minister Castro contended the embassy was a nest of spies from the FBI and the Pentagon.

For outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower, that was the last straw.

"There is a limit to what the United States in self-respect can endure," he said, adding that it was his "hope and conviction" that the two neighbors could resume normal relations shortly.

But soon the relationship became even more tendentious. In April, a band of CIA-trained and financed Cuban exiles invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and were dealt an ignoble defeat, an event that, more than any other, ensured Castro was there to stay.

By December 1961, he felt secure enough to disclose publicly that he was indeed, despite his prior denials, a life-long Marxist-Leninist.

On the anniversary of the diplomatic break, the United States sees Cuba as little more than a Soviet puppet which serves the Kremlin's global ambitions through subversion in Latin America and by sending tens of thousands of expeditionary forces to African countries where Cuba never had historic ties.

To Cuba, the United States is an unrepentant "imperialist aggressor" bent on returning Cuba to the era when the politics was corrupt, the Mafia was king and brothels catered to Americans saturated Havana. A "criminal U.S. trade embargo" against Cuba has been in effect for a generation. There have been numerous documented attempts on Castro's life by the CIA.

In Washington's view, Cuba is a vassal state, a one-time economic showcase that is now an economic pigmy, kept afloat only with the help of more than \$4 billion annually in Soviet aid. Bolstered by a nationwide system of informers, the revolution ruthlessly suppresses all forms of dissent or independent behavior.

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